No. 3.

THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

Issued by direction and under the authority of the American Section of the Theosophical Society in Convention for free distribution to members-at-large. Branches can obtain copies by contributing to the expense. The Theosophical Society is not responsible for any statements contained herein. WILLIAM Q. JUDGE, General Secretary.

* * *

Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

All communications should be addressed to ALEXANDER FULLERTON, BOX 2659, NEW YORK CITY.

June, 1889.

QUESTION VII.

In the first four sentences of LIGHT ON THE PATH *the term "Masters" is in the plural. Why so? Who are these Masters?*

Ans.—The nature, development, powers, qualities, and functions of the Masters are stated with more fulness in Theosophical books (notably *Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Occult World*) than is possible here. Briefly, they are those trained intelligences who, by repression of the lower and expansion of the higher constituents of Manhood, have mounted to heights of knowledge and faculty from which are visible vast stretches of history and vast regions of power imperceptible to us. They have first *mastered* themselves, then Truth and the many forces of Nature. The term implies superiority, wisdom, control. As related to us, it does not mean a despotic authority,—for that would be contrary to the law of freedom and of development from within; but a qualification to teach and guide, analogous to that of any preceptor or educator.

As the number of *savants* is small as compared with the illiterate, so, though much more markedly, must be the number of Masters as compared with ordinary men. It is a universal law that "Extension decreases as intension increases." For this reason, and also because spirituality in its highest grade is of necessity a rare endowment, the group of such exalted Men cannot be large. It may be, indeed, larger than we suppose, partly because the usual limit to human life does not seem to hold in Their case, partly because They come from no one nation or race, but from fitting humanity wherever found. While all speculation

as to figures must be vain, it is certain that each of the various degrees in Mastership has its representatives.

Further, while the peculiarities of individual temperament and opinion neither can be nor should be obliterated in the development of Adepts, the principles of the Order and the method of training are everywhere the same. In other words, spiritual laws are independent of both geography and centuries. There must be uniformity in the requisitions to spiritual progress and in the quality of the tests by which it is tried.

Both of these facts, indeed, are illustrated in the matter of the Theosophical Society. It is well known that its first establishment was not viewed sympathetically by that Section of the Brotherhood to which belong the two Masters whose names are most familiar to Theosophists, and that only those Two were cordially its promoters; but it is also known that, while the remaining members of that Section now endorse the Society and its work, there has never been any difference of judgment in the Section as to what was required of earnest aspirants or as to what were the conditions indispensable to successful effort by the Society as a missionary body.

The Masters being many but Their spiritual system one, it is easy to see why *Light on the Path* prescribes the qualifications it does for advance towards Their ranks, and speaks of Them in the plural. "Before the soul can stand in the presence of the *Masters*, its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart." In other words, before the real man, the inner being, can approach, perceive, consort with,—much more, be one of, the company of Adepts, it must be purged from every weakness or defilement which would unfit it for such a presence. It need not have Their learning, but it *must* have Their purity. As They have undergone a self-discipline which has broken down all hindrance of the lower nature to the free workings of the higher, so must it. As they have vanquished the flesh, subdued passion, wrung the very life out of selfishness and discontent, so must it. As they have conformed to the one discipline, so must it. The unity of the result is preceded by the unity of the preparation.

L. C. B.—I do not think that we can better obtain the meaning of these sentences than by going to the author's interpretation of them. This was given in several articles in the earlier numbers of *Lucifer*, and, as these have been reprinted with the text in the new edition of *Light on the Path* by the Theosophical Book Co. of Boston, it is easy for us to re-read them.

The sentences are put in a metaphorical, even a paradoxical, form in order to force strongly the idea upon the mind. And yet but little perceptive power is needed for showing that the paradox is only super-

ficial and that consistent truth underlies it. "Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears": *i. e.* Before clear, continuous vision can be attained, the blurring influence of emotion must be ended; Truth is visible only to those who are unperverted by passion, prejudice, pique, affection for persons, disappointed ambition, heart sorrow, slavish reverence for authority, and the like. "Before the ear can hear, it must have lost its sensitiveness": *i. e.* Before the inner nature can vibrate responsively to right instruction, it must have rid itself of personal conceits and vanities, learned to dissociate truth from personal relations, acquired the faculty of shutting out discordant or irrelevant matters from attention. "Before the voice can speak in the presence of the Masters, it must have lost the power to wound": *i. e.* Before one is fitted to give utterance to his convictions in a Company where all is grace and sweetness and light, bitterness and censoriousness must have vanished from his spirit. This does not seem to mean that wrong-doing is never to be condemned, but that it is to be condemned without vindictiveness and in a tone free from arrogance or spite. The Masters Themselves have sometimes had occasion to reprove, but the delicacy, gentleness, and tact of Their speech (see instances in *The Occult World*) exhibit the fact that, like one of Their eminent predecessors, St. Paul, (Acts xxvi, 24-27), They are *gentlemen*. "Before the soul can stand in the presence of the Masters, its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart": *i. e.* Before there can be the smallest measure of equality of footing in such an Assembly, the dearest tastes incompatible with it must be drained off and the neophyte be sanctified and clean, no matter at what cost of personal sacrifice and suffering.

These brief expositions seem to me to cover the ground, and they surely commend themselves to our sense of what must be needful to any one seeking entrance to a Masters' Lodge.

QUESTION VIII.

How is the Johnstown disaster to be interpreted from the point of view of Karma?

Ans.—We greatly misconceive the meaning of Karma if we suppose it an exhibition at any particular day or moment of a man's precise deserts at that day or moment. If exact justice was the purport of each incident in each life, not only could there be no such thing as delayed or accumulated Karma, but still another consequence would follow, *i. e.* that, from the very beginning of humanity, each member of it must have experienced in each successive moment the precise consequences of the act in the moment preceding. Justice would instantaneously vindicate itself. Evidently this is not the fact. The case of a child born blind or

malformed disproves it; as also the numberless cases of loss of life in the effort to preserve it for others, of immediate success to acts of perfidy or violence, of long-continued adversity to the good or prosperity to the evil, of the suffering from remorse, of anxiety as to the future world, of the execution, as murderers, of innocent men. All these and many other illustrations show that there is no such instant connection between desert and award as crude Theosophists suppose. The scales are not always exactly balanced; perhaps they rarely are. But it by no means follows that they never will be.

A more rational theory of Karma is that it applies fully to the totality of an existence, only partially to its sections. We undoubtedly reap what we have sown, but we do not reap till the crop is ripe, nor all of that at one time. Between the sowing and the reaping many days and nights must pass,—possibly many lives and deaths which are the days and nights of the individual's career; and during those days there is the reaping of earlier crops. Scattered through them, and due to the excessively intricate and utterly innumerable forces, terrestrial, social, and personal, which are perpetually playing on and rebounding from each atom in the great machine, there may very well be incidents, disasters even, which have no immediate relation to character and do not certainly express desert. The scale will be adjusted later on, partly in Devachan, partly in other lives. The certainty is not in the present appearance, but in the ultimate vindication.

This may explain the Johnstown catastrophe. To suppose that 8,000 out of 25,000 people in one neighborhood were previous assassins whose time for retribution had at last arrived, is to suppose something which feeds neither reason nor sentiment, but rather is nauseating to both. And when we consider that the bereavements of the remaining 17,000 were often more bitter than death itself, such a view of Karma—as stigmatizing the whole valley population—is not simply preposterous, it is revolting. Moreover, if there is any such immediate connection between evil-doing and punishment, why were none of the careless dam-owners swallowed up?

The only logical and temperate interpretation is that, while there may have been in that vast host of victims some whose death was a penalty or an expiation, it is most improbable that the number was large; and that the disaster to the rest, hideous, horrible as it was, was yet one of those incidents inseparable from the complicated machinery of the world, a physical, not a moral, phenomenon, implying no necessary guilt present or past, and, so far as it was undeserved, ensuring adequate renumeration hereafter. This view recognizes all the facts and contingencies and exigencies in such a life as that on earth, and yet upholds the final vindication of inerrant Justice.

For two things are never to be forgotten. 1st, That the reliability

of Karma is not in its instantaneousness, but in its certainty. There is no pretence that it is instantaneous. Few murderers are at once executed; far more die natural deaths. Yet we know that their doom will in time overtake them. So as to other offenses, and so as to the deeds which deserve reward. The return is sure. 2d, That there are other *final causes* in this world than the display of Karma. There are training of character, educing of fortitude, cultivation of ingenuity, stimulus to charity, and many more not numerable now. All life cannot be interpreted from one law.

These things being so, it would seem that the Johnstown disaster is not a violation of Karma or a puzzle to it; and that we must study the whole circle of life, not merely one segment of it contained in a valley, a catastrophe, or a law.

E. B. C.—Understanding Karma as the law of cause and effect in the moral world, we shrink from attributing to it the Johnstown disaster because that is a physical effect from a distinct and obvious physical cause. There seems no need to call in the question of moral desert when weak masonry meets the case. But even more, I think, do we shrink from it because the introduction of the moral question involves the consequence that all these sufferers deserved their fate. One is not prepared to accept a premise leading to a conclusion which is incapable of proof, appears improbable, and jars on charity. And this reluctance is strengthened by the further consequence that, if the survivors suffered only what they deserved, the outpoured help of a nation, even a world, is misdirected. Kindliness is not properly expended on evil-doers undergoing the results of their evil-doing. In fact, if all pain expresses demerit, there would be an end to sympathy and helpfulness, and every hospital and asylum should be demolished at once. This earth would then be much like Tertullian's heaven,—the prosperous complacently smiling over the agonies of the wretched.

No doubt this logical chain of horrors would be fatal to a Karmic theory as to Johnstown *if* the theory is so simple and uncomplicated as the above. But is it? When we perceive that much of the suffering was not physical but mental and emotional, we must let in extra-physical causes to account for extra-physical results; and when we once concede these, we cannot trace their number or quality or ramifications in previous existences. We have supermerged from a limited, definite area into a sphere beyond all bounds or history or investigations. The mind is paralyzed with a sense of its impotence. Its only relief is in the conviction that Karma is a force which does not err, that it may appear mysterious or harsh or undiscriminating, but that it is never unjust, never excessive, and never blind. It will vindicate itself when we know more and can see backward.

Granting this, we may grant also that Karma may have worked itself out up to the point where our beneficence is invoked, and that then *our* Karma, the charitable sentiment engendered in previous lives of sympathy, has its proper function in relief.

These thoughts are not an exhaustive treatment of the topic, but they may help to it.

William Q. Judge.—An imperfect view of Karma is held by many theosophists. Karma is thought to relate only to human beings, and when it is spoken of as "the law of ethical causation," application of it is made solely to man. This not only leaves us without any law to account for the numerous operations and effects in the natural world, but raises grave difficulties in the presence of such a calamity as the Johnstown flood.

Another wrong view frequently taken is the looking upon Karma as punishment only, whereas Karma works alike in reward and punishment. A pleasant life is due to Karma as much as one that is full of woe.

The word "Karma" means "action," and, in its larger sense, the action of the great unmanifested, whether that be called *God* or the *Absolute*. The moment the unmanifested begins to make itself manifest in creation or evolution, then its action and Karma begin. Hence, every circumstance great or small, every manifestation of life, every created thing and all of the facts and circumstances of man's life are under the law of Karma.

The three sorts of Karma are:—

That which we are experiencing; that which we are making for the next life; and that which we have made, but which is held over unfelt until some other life or lives.

This division applies throughout nature.

By what means does Karma have its operation? By means of the apparatus fit to carry it out into view and exhaust it; when this is furnished, the appropriate Karma is felt or seen.

Having all this in view we see that the Karma of the material world (so called), as it now exists, is its Karma left over from a previons manvantara or period of manifestation, working out in the fit apparatus which we call the world. And it may be that there is some "World-Karma" left over to be felt or seen in the next cycle or manvantara.

Under these laws it is possible that many individuals may congregate at just such a place as Johnstown, who possess such physical, mental, and psychical apparatus as tends to bring out at some one period many accumulated weights of Karma; and in such a case they will feel the effects as seen in the flood sweeping them away.

But to say that such a catastrophe is to be called evil Karma in every case cannot be right. Some were killed, and for them we may not say

it was not a benefit; others doubtless will suffer through their lives; and still more may be benefitted through the circumstances which brought about a complete change in life.

We must also remember that during any one hour of the day as many as 10,000 people die in various spots of the earth. Hence we have accumulated and felt at any hour the Karma which brings death about for that number of people.

A. Keightley.—The manifestation of the law of Karma in connection with the Johnstown flood is naturally very complicated. At first sight it seems that the sudden death of such a large number of people, men, women, and children, can hardly be due to the gathering together of the threads of Karma. But while we are horrified, though wrongly, at death, we are not astonished at life. Why should we not be astonished at the Karma which causes so many births in one great city? Again, as Mr. Judge remarked at the Aryan T. S. meeting, it is a fact that many more than 10,000 persons die every day and that a large majority are children. Therefore, so far as the facts of life and death are concerned, we have no right to question Karma as regards the number nor the fact of the death. The question concerning the gathering into one place of so many to die is also partly answered in the comparison of life in a great city. But it seems to me that the fact that any escaped at all is much more a question as regards Karma.

We have to remember that man's body is simply the expression in physical matter of the energies which he has himself stored up in the Astral records which surround what we may call his Soul. These are the lines upon which the mind, which Patanjali calls the internal instrument of the soul, moulds not only the external framework of the body, but its tendencies and characteristics. It is a kind of electro-type process which is strictly in accord with the laws of the Conservation of Energy and works on the line of least resistance on what is called the moral plane. Thus the Karma of the people in Johnstown would be indicated by their incarnation in, or being drawn toward, a place which itself had what we may call a Karma which would tend towards a Cataclysm. The indication of this may be seen in the fact that the dam was faulty in construction from the first. By this I do not mean to imply that all the people in Johnstown were pre-ordained to a violent and sudden death such as they experienced. In a certain proportion this was probably the case. But in others there was a certain amount of *good* Karma which caused their death. We have to remember that in view of the fact of reincarnation and the law of Karma we ought not always to look on death—the great change or rather the moment of change of expression of what is practically eternal—as an unmitigated evil. The analogy of a forcing-house for plants will illustrate my meaning. In

many cases it is the fact that good Karma will quicken and force the expression in physical terms of energy which might otherwise be protracted over a long period. In this sense many people might have their Karma quickened by previous good Karma and concentrated in the agony of a few minutes in the case of Johnstown, instead of wearing out years of slow torture and suffering.

In view of re-incarnation this might mean that they would be freed from suffering and would have another life comparatively free from pain and suffering. And to judge by what we learn of the condition of life of many of those who passed away at Johnstown, this would indeed be an effect of good Karma.

But again, why should such a disaster take place? What caused the flood even if the dam were faulty? We are apt to forget the effect which the mental action of man has upon the nature elementals. We see this in single instances in cases of those who train their faculties; let us apply this in the case of numbers of men and women who may be unconscious of the action. We are liable also to forget that the law of Karma, or rather the law of action, operates as much on nature as it does on man himself. Man creates his surroundings, and his relation to these forms the manifestation of the law of Karma. Thus, then, the united tendency of all in Johnstown, whether according to the quickened or unquickened action of Karma, or to the Karma of the locality, would act on the nature elementals and cause a concentration of their action by means of what are called natural forces. At Johnstown it was the fact that there was a concentration of the water elementals on the hills above the lake.

As regards the survivors: it is on record that the majority of them had most hair-breadth escapes. The same rule of the quickening effect of Karma applies to them. The agony which they have experienced must have affected them powerfully. They really have an increased opportunity, for they are now in the position of having had certain portions of their Karma worked off quickly, and, like a thunderstorm, it has cleared the air for them. They are now like the man in the New Testament; their houses are to some extent swept and garnished, and it is largely their own concern if they re-admit the devils. They have worked off part of what is called their "bad Karma," and are given the opportunity of creating only "good Karma" in the place of it.

The fact is that it is only from the view of "personality" and one incarnation that such a flood is to be regarded as a disaster. From that of Karma and Reincarnation—from the span of our "Greater Life"—it is a great opportunity and will result in most cases in the production of "good Karma."

Copies of Forum No. 2 and of succeeding numbers may be had by sending 5 cents in stamps to the Editor.